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SPANISH
PRONUNCIATION
AND
ACCENT

BY

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SPANISH PRONUNCIATION AND ACCENT

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SPANISH

PRONUNCIATION AND ACCENT

THE ALPHABET

1. The Spanish alphabet comprises thirty letters; twenty-six simple and four compound, as follows:

Characters	Names	Pronunciation	Characters	Names	Pronunciation
a	a	<i>a</i> in <i>mama</i>	n	ene	<i>ā' nay</i>
b	be	<i>bay</i>	ñ	eñe	<i>ain' yay</i>
c	ce	<i>thā</i> in <i>thane</i>	o	o	<i>o</i> in <i>lone</i>
ch	che	<i>chā</i> in <i>chafe</i>	p	pe	<i>pay</i>
d	de	<i>they</i>	q	cu	<i>coo</i>
e	e	<i>ā</i> in <i>bale</i>	r	ere	<i>ā' ray</i>
f	efe	<i>ā' fay</i>	rr	erre	<i>air' ray</i>
g	ge	<i>hay</i>	s	ese	<i>ā' say</i>
h	hache	<i>ā' tchay</i>	t	te	<i>tā</i> in <i>take</i>
i	i	<i>ee</i> in <i>fee</i>	u	u	<i>oo</i> in <i>pool</i>
j	jota	<i>hō'ta</i>	v	ve	<i>vay</i>
k	ka	<i>ca</i> in <i>carry</i>	w	doble u	<i>though' blay oo</i>
l	ele	<i>ā' lay</i>	x	equis	<i>ā' kees</i>
ll	elle	<i>ail' yay</i>	y	ye	<i>yay</i>
m	eme	<i>ā' may</i>	z	zeta	<i>thā' tā, (th inthane)</i>

2. These letters, consisting of vowels and consonants, are all of the feminine gender and, with the exception of *c* and *g*, have always practically the same sound. Ex.: la *i*, las *ies*; la *jota*, las *jotas*.

3. *K* and *w* are used only in words from foreign languages. Ex.: Wáshington, kilógramo.

PRONUNCIATION

4. In Spanish the vowel sounds preponderate. They are full and sonorous, whereas the consonant sounds are more or less slurred and even suppressed.

5. With the exception of *h* and of *u* when the latter is placed after *q* (see 27), and in certain cases when placed after *g* (see 20, 3), there are no silent letters in Spanish; for, excepting the above, every letter in a word is pronounced.

6. The sounds in Spanish are not given as sharply as in English, tonic accent being nothing more than a lengthening of the accented syllable. This indolent intonation produces a more or less drawling effect in the language, when spoken slowly.

NOTE: Until the written or graphic accent is explained (see 44), the vowel to be prolonged in sound will be indicated in heavy type. Should a written accent (´) appear over a vowel in heavy type, the sound is not at all affected thereby.

VOWELS

7. The vowels are *a*, *e*, *i*, (*y*), *o*, *u*.

<i>a</i> sounds like <i>a</i> in <i>mama</i> .	Ex.: <i>la, ma, na, ta, fa</i> .
<i>e</i> sounds like <i>a</i> in <i>bale</i> .	Ex.: <i>le, me, ne, te, fe</i> .
<i>i</i> (<i>y</i>) sounds like <i>ee</i> in <i>fee</i> .	Ex.: <i>li, ly, mi, my, ni, ny, ti, ty</i> .
<i>o</i> sounds like <i>o</i> in <i>lone</i> .	Ex.: <i>lo, mo, no, to, fo</i> .
<i>u</i> sounds like <i>oo</i> in <i>pool</i> .	Ex.: <i>lu, mu, nu, tu, fu</i> .

NOTE: In these and similar monosyllabic examples the vowels in Spanish are pronounced without the slight glide at the end, so common in English, and making almost an additional syllable. Therefore *do not pronounce* as though it were *láuh, léuh, líuh, lóuh, líuh*, etc., but *do pronounce without this addition*, clear, full, and prolonged, *la, le, li, lo, lu*, etc.

8. Double *e* (*ee*) occurs in some words. Each *e* is sounded.
Ex.: *lee, cree*.

9. Final unaccented *e* is shortened in sound like *ai* in *said*.
Ex.: *vase* (*va-sè*, not *va-say*).

10. Before *n* and *r*, ending a syllable,
e sounds like *ai* in *fair*. Ex.: *comer, romper, gobernar*.
o sounds like *o* in *long*. Ex.: *el humor, el honor, la honra*.

11. *U*, when sounded before another vowel in the same syllable, is like the English *w* in *way*. Ex.: *agua* = *a-gwa*, *bueno* = *bweno*, *Guánica* = *Gwá-ni-ca* (not *a-goo-a*, *boo-e-no*, *Goo-á-ni-ca*). But *gradúe* = *gra-doo-e*, because *u* and *e* are not in the same syllable (see 46).

12. *Y* is a vowel when it stands alone or at the end of a word.
Ex.: *y, ley, rey*.

CONSONANTS

13. The consonants are *b, c, ch, d, f, g, h, j, k, l, ll, m, n, ñ, p, q, r, rr, s, t, v, w, x, (y,) z.*
14. **B** is almost like the English *b*, but the lips are not pressed together in sounding the Spanish *b*. Owing to this, *b* and *v* sound very much alike and are often mistaken one for the other: Spanish *Habana* is written and pronounced in English *Havana*. Ex.: *bomba, bonito, débil, débito.*
15. **C** has two distinct sounds.
1. Before *e* or *i* it has the strong sound of *th* in *thin*. Ex.: *cita, cena, Ponce.*
 2. In all other situations except *ch*, it has the sound of *k*. Ex.: *cabo, alcoba, cubo, electro.*
 3. **Qu** takes the place of *c* before *e* or *i* to give the sound of *k*. Ex.: *tocar, toque, chico, chiquito.*
16. **Cc** occurs only before *e* or *i*; hence in accordance with the preceding rule it has the sound of *kth*. Ex.: *accesible, dicción.*
17. **Ch** has the sound of *ch* in *church*. Ex.: *chulo, china, chico, chisme.* *Ch* usually follows *c* in the dictionary.
18. **D** has the soft sound of *th* in *then*; especially between vowels, and before *r*. At the end of a word it approximates the sound of *t*. Ex.: *vivido, hablado, Madrid.*
19. **F, k, l, m, n, p, t,** have the same sound as in English. Ex.: *feble, kilómetro, luna, mano, notable, pena, tocado.*
20. **G** has two distinct sounds.
1. Before *e* or *i* it is a palatal guttural like *ch* in the German *ich*. Ex.: *general, gengibre, San Germán.*
 2. In all other situations, it is hard like *g* in *go*. Ex.: *gato, goma, gusano.*
 3. To make *g* hard before *e* or *i*, *u* must be inserted between them. The *u* is not sounded. Ex.: *gueta, guincha, guindo, gueltre, Aguinaldo.*
 4. If necessary to sound the *u* of *gue, gui*, a diaeresis (*¨*) must be placed over it. Ex.: *vergüenza, averigüéis, argüir, Mayagüez.*

21. **H** is always silent except before *ue*, in which case it has the sound of *h* in *hole*. Ex.: hablar, hambre, huevo, hueso.
22. **J** is always a strong guttural produced by depressing the chin and clearing the throat, causing the soft palate to vibrate. Ex.: jota, junta, jamás.
 1. In *reloj*, pronounced *reló*, *j* is silent. In the plural it is sounded, *relojes*.
23. **Ll** has the sound of *lli* in *William*. Ex.: llorar, llevar, Agoncillo, silla. It follows *l* in the dictionary.
24. **Nm** takes the place of *mm* in English words. Ex.: *immersion* = *inmersión*.
25. **Nn** occurs in some words, each *n* being sounded. Ex.: *en-negrecer*.
26. **Ñ** sounds like *gn* in *mignonette*. Ex.: año, leña, otoño. It follows *n* in the dictionary.
 NOTE: This mark (˜) is called *tilde* in Spanish.
27. **Q** occurs only before *ue* or *ui*. *Qu* is then equal to *k* in sound. Ex.: *que*, *qui*, *querido*, *quiero*. The English sound of *qu* in *quart* is represented in Spanish by *cu*. Ex.: *cuanto*, *cuarto*.
28. **R** has the sound of *r* in English; but at the beginning and end of words and after *l*, *n*, *s*, it is slightly rolled. Ex.: *roto*, *hablar*, *alrededor*, *Enrique*, *ara*.
29. **Rr**, each *r* is distinctly sounded, thus producing a strong roll. Ex.: *perro*, *ferrocarril*, *error*.
30. **S** always has the hissing sound of *s* in *sun*. Ex.: *su*, *se*, *solo*, *son*.
31. **V** is like the English *v*, except that the upper teeth are not firmly pressed against the lower lip; owing to this, *v* and *b* sound very much alike, and are often mistaken one for the other. Ex.: *vara*, *vela*, *visto*, *votos*.
32. **W** imitates the sound it has in the language from which the word is taken, for, like *k*, it is used only in foreign words. Ex.: *Wáldersee*, *West Point* (*pronounced Váldersee*, *Uest Point*).
33. **X** has the sound of *x* in *wax* (*waks*). Ex.: *sexo*, *extran-*

gero, extremo. In older Spanish *x* was guttural, but *j* now takes the place of guttural *x*. Ex.: Méjico.

34. **Y** is a consonant when it begins a syllable; it then has the sound of *y* in *you*. Ex.: leyes, reyes, Cayo, Arroyo.
35. **Z** always has the strong sound of *th* in *thin*. Ex.: zeta, zapador, haz, zanja, Luzón, Múñoz, Martínez.

EXERCISES

SIMPLE VOWELS AND CONSONANTS

NOTE: In the following words, if a vowel has an accent (') over it, lengthen that vowel. If there is no accent (') over any vowel and if the word ends in a vowel or *n*, *s*, lengthen the vowel in the syllable next to the last; but if the word ends in *y* or a consonant not *n*, *s*, lengthen the vowel in the last syllable. The syllable that is lengthened should always be a little higher in pitch than the others.

36. Amo, aya, toro, tela, vive, luna, uno, cuyo, niña, vine, ley, rey, otro, tintero, amigo, amputar, capa, escabeche, modista, mogote, purismo, santidad, gobernador, triste, humanidad, berlina, encorvar, encorvada, todos, usted, cañón, rifle, pistola, grano, hacha, cruz, caballo, cenceño, cepita, comiste, hablaste, corromper, proveer, yacer, asen, asgan, bóveda, conozco, muchísimo, chiche, chiquito, cigarra, ciclo, cigüeño, cincho, certificado, dolor de cabeza, fechar, filosofador, garganta, girofina, glanduloso, gerifalte, gitano, gorgojoso, gorro, guzmanes, gutural, borracho, guindilla, guerrilla, guedejudo, hombre, hocico, juez, juzgado, joya, judas, jarapote, reloj, giralda, gesticular, liguilla, libertadamente, lucir, llovido, llevadero, conmigo, chiquirritín, motín, motines, motilón, motilones, ennoblecer, quemar, querellarse, quintañón, quiromántico, santazo, sanmigueleño, sampsuquino, expansivo, extrañamente, próximo, contrahaz, contrabandista, azucena, revólver, tipográfico, cloroformo, característico, sinopsis, aproches, virulento, enfermiza, cable, capitán, soldado, cabo, sargento, coronel, ejército, electrómetro, ellos, vosotras, ustedes, gramática, adjetivo, nombre, pronombre, castellana, ejemplos, hija, sílabas, acento, culebrazo, damnificador, desasosegadamente, música, mojiganga, regocijadamente, segundogénito, sencillez, villancejo, yasquero, zipizape, Malate, Malolos, Quebradillas, Manila, Luneta, Fajardo, Culebra, Manzanillo, Filipinos.

DIPHTHONGS AND TRIPHTHONGS

37. The strong vowels are, *a, o, e*; the weak vowels are *i* (*y*), *u*.

NOTE: *y* takes the place of *i* at the end of a word.

38. A diphthong is a combination of a strong vowel with a weak vowel or of two weak vowels with each other, counting as a *single* syllable; although each vowel has its own individual sound.

39. A triphthong is a combination of a strong vowel between two weak vowels, counting as a *single* syllable, although each vowel has its own individual sound.

40. In a diphthong or triphthong, the strong vowel is pitched a little higher than the weak and is prolonged at the expense of the weak vowel or vowels. If the diphthong consists of two weak vowels, *it is always the last one* that is prolonged.

41. Two strong vowels coming together count as *two* syllables.
Ex.: *a|e, a|o, o|e, e|o, e|a, o|a*.

trae, maestro, aecho, acaece; nao, rao, aova, aojo; toesa, moeda, roer, poeta; meneo, deseo, veo, trineo; océano, zea, lea, sean, aspeado; boa, boato, poa, roano; zee, lee, roo, zoofito, Humacao, Mindanao, Coamo, guineo.

DIPHTHONGS. (Strong and weak vowels)

42. 1. *ai, ay, au, ia, ua; oi, oy, ou, io, uo; ei, ey, eu, ie, ue.*

aire, hay, paraiso, caiga; pausa, aun, causar; aliviado, rociada, biasa, piache; cuando, cuatro, Juan, mengua; zoilo, oigo, oidor, hoy, soy, voy, doy; bou, toucán, coutelina; Dios, biombo, diobre; fatuo, duodeno; aceite, reino, reír; rey, bey, dey; deuda, feudar, viene, tiempo, nadie, efigie; nuevo, pues, puerto, bueno, Cayey, Siboney, Jauco, Yauco, Santiago, Guanajay, El Caney, Cauto.

DIPHTHONGS. (Two weak vowels)

2. *iu, ui, uy.*

viudo, ciudad, diurno; zuiza, fuir, huimos, ruido; muy.

TRIPHTHONGS

43. *iai, iei, uai, uay, uei, uey.*

variáis, variéis, averiguáis, averigüéis, Paraguay, Uruguay, buey, Chiluey.

NOTE: The vowels in the order of sonorousness are *a, o, e, i, u*; so that the division into strong and weak is not arbitrary but natural.

It is believed by some that unless a diphthong or triphthong gets the tonic accent each vowel is of exactly the same length. Ex.: *baile, bailarín.*

In the first case, *a* is prolonged at the expense of *i*, because *bai* gets the tonic accent; whereas in the second case, since the tonic accent is not on *bai*, it is claimed that *a* and *i* are of exactly the same length. This might be the case if the division into strong and weak vowels were arbitrary; but being a natural division, based upon the organs of speech, diphthongs and triphthongs should always be pronounced more or less the same way, whether they get the tonic accent or not.

THE WRITTEN OR GRAPHIC ACCENT

44. The graphic accent (') indicates to the eye the fact that the word over which it appears is an exception to one of the two general laws of Spanish pronunciation, or else it shows that the word is used with exceptional meaning.

These laws are:

1. Words of more than one syllable ending in a vowel (except *y*), or in a diphthong, or either of the consonants, *n, s*, have the tonic accent on the next to the last syllable. Ex.: *amigo, ventana, hablan, reyes, porque, seria, nadie.*

2. Words of more than one syllable ending in *y*, or in any consonant except *n* or *s*, have the tonic accent on the last syllable. Ex.: *estoy, Paraguay, hablar, comed, mortal.*

45. If the word is not pronounced in accordance with the above laws, a graphic accent must be used to indicate which syllable gets the tonic accent. Ex.: *rincón, huérfano, Andrés.*

46. If the syllable requiring the graphic accent is a diphthong or a triphthong, the graphic accent must be placed over the strong vowel, or over the last of two weak ones. Ex.: *piélago, después, cáustico.*

But, if the Spaniard pronounces the word (consult Spanish dictionary) with the tonic accent on any other vowel, the

graphic accent must appear, of course, over such vowel, thus dissolving the diphthong or triphthong into two syllables. Ex.: leído, gradúe, días, bahía.

47. The following monosyllables are always written with a graphic accent:

1. The preposition *á* and the conjunctions *é, ó, ú*.
2. Monosyllabic forms of verbs in the Past Definite. Ex.: fuí, fué, dí, dió, ví, vió, etc.
3. The more emphatic one of two monosyllables of identical form. Ex.: él, *he*, el, *the*; más, *more*, mas, *but*; tú, *thou*, tu, *thy*.

48. The graphic accent is used to distinguish between the uses of the same word in different meanings. Ex.: sólo, *only*, solo, *alone*; qué? *what?* que, *that*; cómo? *how?* como, *as*; bajo, *I go down*, bajo, *under*.

49. The graphic accent is used in certain correlatives: cuáles . . . cuáles.

NOTE: The graphic accent over the *i* does away with the dot, *í*. The initial letter of a sentence, although a capital, takes the graphic accent when necessary. Ex.: Á decir verdad, no puedo comer.

50. The foregoing is the method of using the graphic accent adopted by the Royal Spanish Academy in 1888. Up to that time *n* and *s* had been considered as consonants; by this system, they are considered as vowels, *for purposes of written accentuation*.

SYLLABICATION

51. A single consonant between two vowels always goes with the following vowel to form a syllable: ca-sa, me-sa, a-mor, flu-xión.

52. The letters *ch, ll, ñ* and *rr* are considered as simple consonants: chi-co, ca-lle, ni-ño, tie-rra.

53. Generally two or three consonants between vowels are separated; the first one belonging to the preceding syllable: con-ten-to, in-mer-sión, ac-ción, en-no-ble-cer.

54. Diphthongs and triphthongs are indivisible: bue-no, la-bo-rio-so, a-ve-ri-güéis, ver-güen-za, a-ve-ri-guáis.

CAPITALS AND PUNCTUATION

55. Capitals are used as in English.

Él es Juan. Quiero estar en París.

56. The following are exceptions:

1. The names of the days of the week and of the months of the year:

January, *enero*, June, *junio*, August, *agosto*; Monday, *lunes*, Saturday, *sábado*, Sunday, *domingo*.

2. Proper adjectives:

El libro francés, *the French book*; el comerciante alemán, *the German merchant*.

But el Francés, *the Frenchman*, el Alemán, *the German*.

3. The pronoun *yo*, unless it begins a sentence or introduces a direct quotation:

Yo estoy aquí. Él ha dicho: "Yo tengo dinero." ¿Qué he dicho yo?

57. Rules for punctuation are the same as in English, except that interrogative and exclamatory sentences require in addition an inverted mark at the beginning (¿) (¡) unless the sentence commences with an interrogative pronoun or adverb, which, always having an accent, will indicate sufficiently the kind of sentence. This, however, is not always followed, and it is always correct to use the two marks in any interrogative or exclamatory sentence. Ex.: ¿Quiere V. este libro? Qué tienes, Juanito? Qué lástima! ¡Ay de mí!

GENERAL EXERCISES**DIPHTHONGS, TRIPHTHONGS, AND TWO STRONG VOWELS**

58. Aire, airoso, cantáis, hay, causa, caudal, heroico, voy, soy, sois, bou, rey, reinado, veis, feudo, eunuco, lluvia, diablo, cual, agua, aprobación, nación, cuota, mutuo, fiel, nieto, nadie, pues, fuego, pueril, ciudad, viudo, muy, cuidado, cuita. Cambiáis, varíéis, fraguáis, guay, santiguéis, buey, país, aún, oído, leí, armonía, período, confíe, falúa, continúo, continúe, flúido, día, tío, dúo, léido, caída. Caer, traemos, aecho, aéreo, aerómetro, aoristo,

aovado, oenas, oeste, oenate, eólico, veo, leo, ea pues! marea, galantea, cojea, bautismo, torador, canoa, canoero, canói, canoíta, guardia, faccioso, droguería, juez, creeré, reunir, héroe, cuadro, cuaderno, cuestión, cuestiones, matigüelo, parihuela, sanguisuela, sangüeso, excepción, argüimos, cuesta, recuerdo, hierro, suelo, sueño, yuxtaposición, conmociones, güepil, relampaguea, meajuela, piernas, agonía, debió, menguada, cotidiano, melifluo, zuizón, mausoleo, toalla, meaúca, mauseolo, Vizcaino, Camagüeyano, Nicaragüense, caracteres, regímenes, téngase, butre, andamio, ganzúa, cigüeña, cazuela, cuidadoso, tortuoso, imbuido, Escorial, majuelo, Malagueño, matrimonio, narración, ocurrencia, cuarenta, curioso, distraído, Guipuzcoano, Leonés, idioma, ingeniero, leudo, juicio, monstruo, revuelto, tejuelo, santiguarse, viajero, lisonjean, aeronautas, titubeó, bailadores, pies, avergüenzo, aguardo, salteador, náufrago, hubiésemos, mareado, oigo, usuario, albaceazgo, votación, Sierra Maestra, Guayama, Aibonito, Utuado, Vieques, Cienfuegos, Chihuahua, Puerto Rico, Puertorriqueña.

READING

NOTE: Spanish vowels coming together, whether in the same or different words, are sounded with a smooth glide of the voice from one to the other, without the distinct separation made in sounding the vowels in English words. Ex.: Mi_amigo_está_aquí.

LA HERMANA DE LA CARIDAD

59. “— Óyeme, y pásmate, Eduardo. Yo he visto aquí, un ministro poderoso, dueño de la voluntad del rey, caer en desgracia. La gente lo sabía, y él lo ignoraba. Un baile fué la señal de su desgracia. La reina acostumbraba á bailar todas las noches de sarao el primer rigodón con él: la noche destinada á herirle, no lo bailó. Apartáronse de él los cortesanos como si estuviera apestado; riéronse de su catadura los mismos que le prestaban homenaje; encontróse en aquellos salones donde todas las frentes, hasta las frentes coronadas, le acataban, solo, aislado, sin un amigo. Su desgracia creció, y un día se vió preso, y otro próximo al cadalso, y hoy anda acaso en tierra extraña, pidiendo una miserable limosna para mantener á sus hijos.